



# Narratives and metaphors in service development

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this is to present a new combined, projective technique, the event-based narrative inquiry technique (EBNIT), and analyze how it adds to traditional interviewing techniques in service development contexts for yielding new service ideas and evaluating current service.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper proposes and tests the new EBNIT technique in three service development projects in the information and communication technology field. The technique combines principles from the narrative inquiry technique and critical incident technique (CIT) as well as the use of projective elements in the form of metaphors.

**Findings** – Metaphors combined with lived critical and imaginary events helps to generate creative new service ideas. Customer experiences may be employed to interpret unspoken, tacit knowledge, which is beneficial when companies want to learn and create something new with the customer.

**Research limitations/implications** – Metaphors are necessary in order to find truly new, customer-oriented ideas. Through imaginary events, narratives are linked to lived experiences and make new ideas concrete and focused on issues that are relevant for customers in their daily lives in a broad context. In contrast to using solely CIT, narratives result in a dialogue that includes social and cultural aspects of events.

**Originality/value** – The narrative inquiry technique has not traditionally been used in service development. The paper suggests that when combined with the CIT and metaphors, narrative analysis becomes a manageable technique, which can be implemented in different service and product development settings.

**Keywords** Narratives, Metaphors, Customer services quality, Innovation

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to present a new, combined projective technique, which we put forward as the event-based narrative inquiry technique (EBNIT). Projective techniques are suitable for use when ideas and hypotheses are required, and informants are either reluctant or unable to express them with straightforward techniques (Boddy, 2004, 2005; Webb, 1992). In the marketing literature, projective techniques can be divided into four different categories:

- (1) association tasks (e.g. brand personification);
- (2) completion tasks (e.g. sentence or story completion task);
- (3) construction tasks (e.g. bubble drawings/cartoon tests); and
- (4) expressive tasks (e.g. role play) (Steinman, 2009; Will *et al.*, 1996).



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This paper contributes to projective techniques and especially to the expressive category by introducing and giving guidelines in using the narrative inquiry technique combined with critical events, in order to understand the storyteller's experience. A metaphor (e.g. a magic wand) is used as a projective technique to ask the storyteller to create a projection of their existing story in the form of a new story that tells how the event would take place in an ideal world.

Many researchers recognize that using projective techniques require expertise from researchers (Steinman, 2009; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2006; Boddy, 2005) and consider this as being the primary disadvantage of using projective techniques (Donoghue, 2000). The complexity of the data and the need for skilful researchers to analyze it makes projective techniques expensive and difficult to administer (Donoghue, 2000; Burns and Lennon, 1993). A further disadvantage of projective techniques has been considered to be the reliability of the instruments (Steinman, 2009; Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002). Several authors (Steinman, 2009; Boddy, 2005; Donoghue, 2000) call for critical discussion on reliability and validity while using projective techniques in market research. This paper suggests ways to overcome this challenge by using projective techniques in combination with the critical incident technique (CIT). The incident or event-based technique links narratives to a concrete use context that influences behaviour, therefore making them more realistic and reliable. It is suggested here that when used in conjunction with the CIT, narratives and metaphors have the potential to generate rich data in a relatively cost-effective and manageable way. Furthermore, we argue that the use of metaphors is critical for the creation of truly innovative new service and product ideas. This paper discusses how the use of narrative inquiry combined with critical events and projective elements in the form of metaphors adds to traditional interviewing techniques in service development contexts. The results are applicable to service development in a broad context, including products and goods as resources for co-creating a better, holistic service experience for the customers (Gummesson, 2008; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

The major benefits of combining event-specific information and service use context with narratives, as well as using metaphors as projective elements during the interviews, are presented with examples from empirical studies. EBNIT has been developed during three empirical studies conducted in the information and communication technologies (ICT) field. Use of the EBNIT technique has resulted in several new creative service ideas that would have been very hard to produce with traditional interviewing techniques.

A brief theoretical background of how the CIT, narrative inquiry and metaphors are used in the service management literature is provided below. The paper presents EBNIT and discusses the use of narratives combined with critical and imaginary events, as well as metaphors. The EBNIT guidelines suggest:

- how to prepare for the dialogue;
- steps in the dialogue; and
- how to analyze the dialogues and interpret the results.

Additionally, we discuss the practical limitations of EBNIT.

### **Theoretical background: critical incidents, narratives and metaphors in service development**

It may be argued that the predominant research methods, in research on marketing and consumer behaviour, which focus on the measurement of existing attitudes using

straightforward questioning techniques and explicit attitude measures are ill-suited to use for service development and service innovation research, where creating something new and unexpected is wanted (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002; Steinman, 2009). In traditional interviews, customers are asked to describe service parameters and to evaluate them. This type of reasoning requires retrospective analysis, and as such is not a suitable technique for triggering ideas for types of service or products that do not even exist yet. In order to attract new ideas, instead of collecting data from the past, the paper suggests using projective techniques that are able to interpret tacit knowledge. Within service development, tacit customer knowledge refers to unspoken needs and wants with existing experiences-in-use. Tacit knowledge is highly personal and hard to formalize, and it is deeply rooted in a person's actions and experience. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Polanyi (1966) define tacit knowledge as something that is not explicitly formulated. The combination of tacit and explicit knowledge can be explored by a meaningful dialogue, in which a metaphor helps to elucidate the tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Ballantyne and Varey (2006b) position communication in a network environment and define dialogue as a potential for learning something new together. With this they include tacit knowledge in the dialogue. Projective techniques have the potential to generate tacit information related to a customer experience that cannot be obtained through other means (Pettigrew and Charters, 2008).

#### *Critical incidents*

In the CIT, dialogue takes place with the storyteller and researcher. CIT focuses on "critical events, incidents, of factors that help promote or detract from the effective performance of some activity or the experience of a specific situation or event" (Butterfield *et al.*, 2005). The CIT has frequently been used in quality management and relationship studies (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000; Roos, 2002). Flanagan's (1954) original guidelines for using the technique encouraged the creative use of the technique for different purposes, starting by deciding on the purpose of the study and formulating the questions accordingly. Recent CIT studies have, for example, employed CIT to explore why self-service technologies are used (Meuter *et al.*, 2000) and to examine the perceived value of mobile services (Pihlström, 2008). It has proven to be a good technique for discovering value-enhancing service components (Stauss, 1993) and useful for identifying issues that have not been considered in previous literature (Gremler, 2004). Most importantly, the incident or event-based technique is able to identify concrete customer needs that may not be revealed by attribute-based quantitative techniques (Stauss and Hentschel, 1992). It is also well suited for service development purposes, because it reveals concrete customer experiences and either problem situations in current services or especially satisfying or valuable service experiences, depending on whether the focus is on negative, positive, or both kinds of incidents.

#### *Narratives*

The application of narratives as a method to involve customers in service development is relatively new, although narratives have the capability to convey tacit knowledge and customers' experiences (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Webster and Mertova (2007) suggest that there is no single narrative inquiry technique, but rather a combination of methods implemented in individual disciplines. In this study, the term "narrative" is

understood in its wider meaning as the narrative inquiry research technique and relates to methodology as well as to a technique (Czarniawska, 2004).

Narrative is told in a specific situation to a specific audience, and it includes a plot. The story consists of: “character (users, stakeholders), plot (task, sequence of events), and setting (environment, context)” (McKee, 1997). Stories are preferably told in a chronological order, and they have a beginning, a middle and an end. Narratives include a time aspect and as such are able to reflect the past, present, and future experiences (Czarniawska, 2004). Webster and Mertova (2007) indicate that in addition to explicit knowledge, stories rely on tacit and unspoken knowledge being understood. In a story, thought and action are inseparable and can be discussed between the storyteller and the interviewer. The storytellers are able to express their experiences in events that are either lived or imagined. An interviewer is able to seek knowledge and understanding in a dialogue (Czarniawska, 2004).

In Table I, the essence of the narrative inquiry technique is compared to the CIT and to quantitative and qualitative methods in general. Even if a narrative method is often categorized under qualitative methods, we want to make a distinction between qualitative methods and the narrative inquiry technique. With this, we aim to give the reader an understanding of the approach and focus of narratives. The narrative inquiry technique rejects the idea that truth and knowledge can only be found through rational thought or method. Instead, narrative inquiry is interested in the subjective, individual experience as data (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Czarniawska, 2004). Narrative inquiry is interested in a holistic way in multiple voices (truths), relationships between disciplines and integrating things. It has practical concerns, listens to personal voices and is concerned with social, ethical, and cultural responsibilities (Webster and Mertova, 2007). According to Polkinghorne (1988), a finding in narrative research is significant if it is important. Narrative researchers emphasize that narrative inquiry is intersubjective as both the story and its

	Quantitative methods	Qualitative methods	Narrative inquiry	CIT
Focus of research	Measurable elements	Human element	Human experience	Human experience
Method of analysis	Descriptive/inferential statistics	Logical deduction	Convey/understand knowledge	Inductive descriptions linked to behaviour
Analysis approach	Systematic	Content analysis	Critical events	Critical incidents
Reporting style	Generalizing	Narrowing	Broadening	Summarizing
Type of knowledge	Aims to be objective	Aims to be subjective and descriptive	Aims to be intersubjective and context-specific	Aims to be subjective and context-specific
Sample size	Large	Small	Small	Small

**Note:** We have added the CIT (Flanagan, 1954) and revised the table  
**Source:** Amended from Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 115)

**Table I.**  
Qualities of different  
research methods

interpretation are subjective (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Shankar *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, differences between individuals, storytellers and researchers are to be expected and even valued (Webster and Mertova, 2007). It has been suggested that validity and reliability are not relevant for narrative inquiry (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Consequently, Riessman (1993) suggests that in narrative inquiry, persuasiveness and coherence of data should be used rather than reliability, as the data are clearly subjective and context-specific. Persuasiveness in narrative research exists when theoretical claims are supported by storytellers' experiences. In addition, discussing alternative interpretations of the data adds to persuasiveness.

In CIT, the data analysis aims at summarizing and describing the data in a useful manner, while at the same time "sacrificing as little as possible of their comprehensiveness, specificity, and validity" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 344). Categorization is one of the hallmarks of CIT that links the incidents to positive or negative behaviour. However, categorization also diminishes the goals of the phenomenological approach of capturing the context and situation (Butterfield *et al.*, 2005). Another limitation of CIT is that it requires experience of using a specific product or service. Therefore, we also apply techniques from narrative inquiry, in order to broaden the analysis to include information of events and stories that go beyond one's own experiences of using some specific product or service.

Webster and Mertova (2007) refer to the broadening nature of the narrative inquiry technique as it explores new ways of viewing and conducting research of human experience in a variety of environments. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) emphasize the social aspect of narratives and argue that individual experiences in the form of narratives are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted by social, cultural, and institutional narratives. Narrative inquiry reconstructs a person's experience in relation to the other people in a social environment (Pace, 2008; Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; Shankar *et al.*, 2001). In conclusion, we apply principles both from the narrative inquiry technique and CIT. Thereby, we aim to understand hidden needs that are socially and culturally embedded in people's lives, but start the research process with summarizing experiences that are critical and based on specific, memorable events that are linked to current behaviour or behavioural intentions.

Butterfield *et al.* (2005) postulate that different researchers have variously used the terms "incident" and "event" in the literature using narratives and critical incidents. In this paper we use the term "event" in line with the narrative inquiry technique. Webster and Mertova (2007) have categorized the events into "critical", "like", and "other". Webster and Mertova (2007) define both critical and like events to be significant for whoever experiences such an event. However, they are experienced with different people. Other events are more informal and often intuitively elaborate on the critical events. The other events may not emerge naturally, without using projective techniques, such as metaphors.

### *Metaphors*

New service developers and consumers use metaphors to understand each other better and to capture needs and ideas from fresh perspectives (Durgee and Chen, 2006). Hunt and Menon (1995, p. 82) define metaphor as "something that compares two concepts or things, where the primary concept is compared to the secondary concept". These two concepts belong to different domains; a metaphor smashes them together

and brings new meanings into the world (Durgee and Chen, 2006). This makes metaphors ideal for creating new ideas in service development. In Table II, we have listed some potential connections between customer needs, metaphors and new service ideas.

Metaphors have been used in describing the whole service of a company, as well as referring to customer needs and wants, for need finding (Zaltman, 2003; Rapaille, 2001), new product idea generation (VanGundy, 1988; Cougar, 1995; Schön, 1979; Dahl and Moreau, 2002) and new product design (Dumas, 1994). For example, the service of Singapore Airlines has been described by the metaphor of a martial art, kung-fu, which combines speed and flexibility and directing hard energy at the right time to specific, targeted points (Heracleours *et al.*, 2005). With the help of a metaphor, the narrative is transferred from its customary realm to a new realm, inviting entities, structures, and interlining relationships of the realms from which they are borrowed (Goodman, 1988).

**Event-based narrative inquiry technique**

We introduce a new technique called the EBNIT. It combines different qualitative techniques in order to get the storyteller into the right mindset, so that concrete, new, usable ideas emerge. It also helps to focus research and service development on those ideas that are most likely to be used in the future based on the social, cultural, and situational setting in which they were reported. Hence, EBNIT combines use of events, narratives and metaphors in an innovative way that results in a cost-effective way of conducting qualitative research. With service development projects, time is often limited and causes an additional constraint. Therefore, on one hand, the analysis should be manageable and cost-effective. On the other hand, the challenge is to make the analysis holistic enough to be able to describe customers’ experiences in a broader context.

*Advantages of EBNIT*

- *Event.* Focusing discussion first on lived critical events in line with CIT, the research focuses directly on the relevant issues that have an impact on behavioural intentions. It saves time both in interviewing and analyzing the data. Short stories can be effectively collected in a wide range of situations. Stories become manageable, short and easy to communicate further to the development team. Events provide rich, in-depth data with low costs, because a small number of interviews is sufficient.
- *Narrative.* Broadening the discussion to include narratives of other lived events in line with the narrative inquiry technique enables understanding the phenomena in a broader context and combining new innovative ideas in a holistic

Service category	Need	Metaphor	New service idea
Retail banking	Accessibility	Vending machine	ATM
TV news	More available	Round clock radio	CNN
Pizza restaurant	Indoor catering	Call service	Pizza taxi
Book shops	Easy shopping	Library at home	Amazon.com
Maps	Easy to study while driving	Electronic co-driver	Navigator

**Source:** Adapted from Durgee and Chen (2006, p. 295)

**Table II.**  
How metaphors and consumer wants might have been used to create many of today’s service offerings

way, including social and cultural aspects. One advantage of the narrative inquiry technique is that it can be an ongoing process, which means that it does not need to be a one-off research within a specific time frame.

- *Metaphor*. Using metaphors broadens the discussion to include imaginary events and diminishes the limitations of interviewer and storyteller of thinking of what is possible at the moment. Use of metaphors is critical, because new ideas require thinking out of the box, which rarely occurs with traditional interviewing techniques. Imaginary events describe events that are co-constructed during the imaginary narrative. The role of the metaphor is to trigger these imaginary events, in which the storyteller re-edits the critical event. These events are potential and act as ideas for the service developers. Metaphors have the capability to reach unspoken, tacit needs and wants, which are potentially valuable in co-constructing new or revised service.

### **Method: how to use EBNIT**

The purpose of EBNIT is to ask for experiences based on spoken and unspoken (tacit) needs and to trigger ideas for new types of service. The interviewer and the storyteller construct an imaginary narrative with the help of a metaphor. The imaginary narratives are prepared by preliminary questions elaborating on critical events the storytellers have experienced using the service. In case of a new service, the critical events elaborate on potential needs and wants for a potential service.

The process of EBNIT includes conveying the storyteller's lived experience focusing on a service event. Belk (1974) has suggested that a combination of measures including circumstances, contexts or situations and personal product preferences could result in optimal predictions of customer behaviour. The storyteller co-constructs together with the interviewer an imaginary experience as a solution to the lived critical event with the help of a metaphor. The process of the EBNIT includes the following architectural elements:

- Storyteller's experiences with a service phenomenon.
- Focus on lived critical events with the help of preliminary questions.
- Storytellers describe how lived critical events would take place in an ideal world. Imaginary events are triggered with the help of a metaphor (e.g. a magic wand). Imaginary events construct solutions to explicit and tacit needs and wants with the help of narratives.

### *Steps in EBNIT*

We will now go through the major steps in the EBNIT. The aim is to illustrate to the reader the process of the technique in practice. The steps are:

- preparing for the interviews;
- recruiting suitable interviewers;
- choice of storytellers;
- preliminary questions;
- imaginary narratives with the help of metaphors; and
- how to categorize and interpret the results.

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### *1. Preparing for the interviews*

The interview structure is essential and should be developed jointly by researchers and service developers. The following questions can be used:

- Who are the potential customers for the new or revised service?
- How do we reach them, to which event(s) are they linked?
- What is the domain of the new/revised service? What is the integrated service?
- What are the preparatory questions to calibrate the lived critical events?
- What could the metaphor triggering the projection of tacit needs and wants be?

The research team needs to think of potential metaphors and test them in advance. We have usually created three metaphors and chosen one based on the test interviews. A triggering metaphor can be anything that is easy to understand and encourages the storyteller to come out of the box in order to trigger creative thinking.

We have used metaphors such as a magic wand, an electronic secretary, a genie of the internet, and an electronic co-driver. The target group is an essential consideration in the choice of the metaphor. For example, for adults, an electronic secretary is an understandable metaphor. For youngsters, who are heavy users of chat rooms, an electronic avatar[1] might be more familiar.

Interviews should take place in an environment tranquil enough to allow creative thinking. People who are distracted or busy are not in the right mindset to create a flow of thoughts necessary for creative thinking. As usual, storytellers should be informed and their approval should be asked in accordance with the ethical code of conduct in qualitative research. It is often advisable to obtain a confirmation of willingness to participate in an interview in writing. Preparing the interview is a process comprising test interviews and further development at the initial stage of the process. Appropriate time should be allocated for this step.

### *2. Recruiting suitable interviewers*

Interviewers need some understanding of the existing service phenomenon (Flanagan, 1954). As this technique cannot be totally pre-programmed, we do not recommend using interviewers who are unable to create a dialogue and to manage unexpected turns during the interview. Being a good listener is a prerequisite for an interactive dialogue. The interviewers should also have some understanding of the domain of the service, as well as customer needs and wants connected to service development. Imaginative capability is desirable, as co-construction of narrative requires coming out of the box, stretching beyond predominant thinking. Thus, trained researchers specialized in qualitative research are to be preferred to general market research experts or company representatives.

### *3. Choice of storytellers*

EBNIT represents understanding a person's past experiences, and based on it, co-constructing new, imaginary experiences with a specific event. It aims at learning with the customers and creating something new with the help of a dialogue (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006a). We recommend interviewing storytellers who are familiar with the service phenomenon. In case of a totally new service, it is an advantage if the storytellers are familiar with service events with some analogy with the new, potential service.



*4. Preliminary questions*

In the first phase, customers are interviewed about their event-based experiences with the existing service. A storyteller’s familiarity with the service phenomenon can be established through the preliminary questions. In case of a totally new service, the domain of the service and related events are discussed. With these preliminary questions, customers are able to have a retrospective dialogue with the interviewer on the kind of lived events they have experienced as critical. Other lived critical events further elaborate on the significance of these events, even if they are different events.

*5. Imaginary narratives with the help of metaphors*

After the warm-up questions scanning the lived critical events and other lived events, the interviewer introduces the metaphor, checks that the storyteller feels comfortable with it and asks him or her to tell a story of how the service event would have passed according to his or her wishes.

With the help of metaphors, storytellers proceed by constructing a story, in which they describe an imaginary solution to the user needs and wants in a narrative form. Often, user needs and wants are akin to those cited as critical events, and they are often experienced as negative events exposing shortcomings in current service. Imaginary events present a solution to the tacit needs and wants and are often experienced as positive events.

*6. How to categorize and interpret the results*

The narratives can be first categorized into:

- lived critical events, if the events are critical and confirmatory in explaining, e.g. behavioural changes;
- other lived events, if the narrative is not mentioned first as being critical, but explains the phenomena further in a broader context; and
- imaginary events, if they are based on an imaginary situations with a potential new service or suggest how a currently available service should work (Table III).

Then, the analysis process follows general qualitative analysis procedures from inductive categorization, to forming thematic categories within the three types of events, and interpreting the results in a broader context through reflective extracts from the narratives (Spiggle, 1994).

**Findings: data from three cases**

The guidelines presented in this paper are based on experiences from three different case studies conducted from 2002 to 2008. Details of the samples and focus of studies, the techniques used, as well as the new service ideas generated with each study are summarized in Appendix, Table AI.

**Table III.**  
Definition of terms lived critical event, other lived events and imaginary events in EBNIT

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<i>Lived experience</i>	
Lived critical event	An event selected because of its unique, illustrative, and confirmatory nature
Other lived event	Confirms and repeats the experience of the critical event
<i>Imaginary experience: potentially better use experience</i>	
Imaginary event	Event told in an imaginary narrative, which has been created with the help of a metaphor. Often transforms critical or like events, i.e. how the storyteller would like it to happen

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In the first study, we explored mobile service experiences by interviewing 31 people. During the interviews, storytellers came up with just five creative ideas for new types of mobile services that did not yet exist. The low number of new ideas may be due to the fact that no metaphor was used in the first study. In the example presented in Table IV, a person illustrates a lived critical event and other lived event, both of which are positive. However, she had experienced them as critical, i.e. meaningful in her life. The imaginary event she constructed without a metaphor.

In the second and third studies, we used metaphors to trigger new service ideas based on experienced needs and wants. The metaphor for the young man was a genie on the internet. He had been watching Walt Disney’s movie Aladdin and did not have any difficulties associating with a genie who would fulfil his wishes.

The middle-aged lady had a metaphor of a magic wand that would make everything possible. She felt familiar with that metaphor and it triggered new, innovative ideas with the existing service. The co-creation of new service ideas was increased noticeably; in fact we co-constructed new service ideas in most interviews in the second and third studies (Appendix, Table AI). All three storytellers presented examples of expressed needs and wants as an imaginary narrative. They all had some experience with the generic type of service.

The second study was conducted in a project developing a new, assembled service innovation in the location-aware service setting by interviewing 15 people. Table V illustrates a narrative where a person indicates that the experience of privacy is important to her, and during her “own” time, electronic devices demanding her attention disturb her. Her lifestyle allowed her to check the instructions on how to get to a destination in advance, before driving there. However, should she not be able to do that, she would use the service while driving, if it was more convenient to use.

The third study focuses on different types of Web 2.0[2] service consisting of 25 interviews. Table VI illustrates a narrative with a male who has matured and is no longer an active member of an online social networking website called IRC Gallery.

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*Lived experience: convenience of using a service with a mobile phone*

Lived critical event	“Just today I ordered train timetables with my mobile phone. It went quite well. We were at the summer cottage; we had no access to timetables and no other media was available, so we needed to do it by mobile phone. Just in situations like this, mobile content is very useful”
Other lived event	“Once, I was arguing with my friend. I sent her a funny picture message with a teddy bear and text that I am really sorry. Then the friend usually calls and says that it doesn’t matter. That sort of stuff is fun, the argument is usually settled. It is easier to send such a message than to call”

*Imaginary experience: new idea for mobile service content*

Imaginary event without a metaphor	“If I am planning to go to the movies at the weekend I always need to [...] I don’t know which movies are showing [...] I need to spend half an hour looking for that old newspaper where the program is in order to know what movies are on [...] it would be convenient if I could order the information [to my mobile phone] on what movies are currently showing”
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**Note:** Female, 16 years

**Table IV.**  
Events using  
mobile service

**Table V.**  
Type of lived customer  
experience: privacy with  
imaginary experience

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<i>Lived experience: privacy is prioritized, not wanting to use electronic service while driving</i>	
Lived critical event	"Driving is my own personal time. I don't want to use a navigator when I drive. I check the destination and route in advance on my computer, if I don't know the way"
Other lived event	"It is OK that my car would be tracked and traced. I would feel it sort of safe in case something happens. But my husband also drives my car. I know he would not like it to be tracked and traced. And I don't want to have access to that data"
<i>Imaginary experience: better user interface</i>	
Imaginary event	"If I didn't have the chance to check where to drive in advance. Then I would appreciate a voice telling me where to go. But I definitely do not want to read anything while I drive"
<b>Note:</b> Female, around 50 years	

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**Table VI.**  
Type of lived customer  
experience: change of  
lifestyles with an  
imaginary experience

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<i>Lived experience: change of lifestyle, not active in social online forums any more</i>	
Lived critical event	"I used to chat a lot but not anymore. Now I prefer to meet people ? how do you say it ? physically at school"
Other lived event	"I don't listen to music on the linternet that much anymore. Nowadays I need to study much more"
<i>Imaginary experience: better user interface</i>	
Imaginary event	"I would take and store a lot more pictures if I could take them with my mobile phone and just save them directly in specific files on my computer, or share them directly with my friends"
<b>Note:</b> Male, around 20 years	

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He preferred the experience of personal meetings to virtual discussions. The change of use was due to his change of lifestyle. However, with the new lifestyle, he would be willing to use the service more if it was more convenient to use across a mobile device and PC.

Metaphors trigger people to imagine that many such events may be possible that they currently think of as being impossible. Systematic reasoning of technical limitations often prevents new ideas. In EBNIT, metaphors drive the narratives toward a search for real or imaginary dialogues. The storyteller and the interviewer are able to co-construct a new context. In this new context, statements can interact and further produce new meanings.

However, we would like to emphasize that even if the aim of using metaphors and imaginary stories is to generate new innovative ideas, the ideas are not ready-made solutions. We received very innovative, extravagant ideas as well as practically thought-through suggestions for the development of the service. The companies need to make strategic decisions on further development based on the chosen strategy, resources and technical and other possibilities. One possible way of evaluating emerging development ideas is to evaluate their potential systematically. For example, the development team in Case 2 prepared digital "cards", which categorized lived critical events and innovative ideas in comparison with technical possibilities and strategic choices. In addition, the cards were used as an archive to record which ideas were realized and developed further, and which were either postponed or rejected. Such records make utilization of collected data also more effective across development projects.

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## Discussion and conclusions

The limitations of traditional market research, based on respondents' experiences of current services and historical usage data, can be overcome by using narratives linked to a specific situation or event where services or products may be used. Narratives are able to convey customer voices that otherwise might be unheard or do not appear from the data. The use of metaphors enables the researchers to guide the respondents into an imaginary world where everything is possible.

In the first case study, we did not use any metaphors, and it seemed difficult for some respondents to elaborate on possible other events that are not based on their own experiences of existing services and products. Nevertheless, five out of 31 respondents did come up with descriptions of such potential new use situations. In the later two cases metaphors were used, and it helped the respondents to think out of the box and to create new ideas. Therefore, we recommend the use of metaphors in connection with narrative inquiries. In terms of methodological and theoretical contributions, this study demonstrates the benefits of combining projective elements with event-based inquiry techniques and narratives.

We suggest that the EBNIT has potential as a manageable method of listening to customer experiences. The EBNIT method is well suited for the early stages of concept development. Owing to its creative nature, it is suitable when there is a need to learn and create something new. The creative nature of EBNIT offers researchers and managers a technique to trigger ideas for new service development on the basis of tacit needs and wants. The preliminary interviewing stages and discussions about lived critical events are necessary, because they make it easier for respondents to create an imaginary story with the help of a metaphor, as they know on what to focus. The use of critical events makes the analysis of narrative interviews more manageable and focuses on the specific event. Focusing on an event has the purpose of summarizing facts that are relevant to both the storyteller and the interviewer in a chosen context.

The narrative inquiry technique with the experiential approach adds to this discussion by justifying intersubjective, context-specific experiences in stories as data in research. This paper contributes to the service development research methodology literature by presenting EBNIT and showing how metaphors and narratives can be used to yield innovative development ideas, due to their capability for interpreting people's tacit needs based on their experiences as customers. In addition, the paper contributes to the literature on projective techniques by introducing a combined technique of using metaphors with narratives and structuring the findings through critical and imaginary events. The paper suggests that when combined with critical events, narrative analysis becomes a manageable technique which can be implemented in different service settings. Metaphors are necessary in order to find truly new, customer-oriented ideas without limiting oneself to technical capabilities or expertise in one specific field of business. Furthermore, linking metaphors and new imaginary use benefits with a certain event helps to keep new service ideas realistic and based on concrete situations, where similar existing services have proven to be useful.

### *Limitations*

Metaphors as projective techniques need to be understandable and somehow familiar to the storytellers, in order to create new ideas. Hunt and Menon (1995) note that metaphors typically used in marketing originate from four sources: military science,

sports, biology, and sociology and home economics. According to our experience, different individuals react differently to metaphors, and the interviewer needs to discuss with the storyteller whether an imaginary (e.g. a magic wand) or more practically oriented metaphor is preferred. Thus, it is hard to standardize the use of metaphors in market research. The narratives of the events and needs are subjective and cannot be generalized to describing the needs of a specific target group. The ideas and concepts generated through the EBNI technique should be further tested with larger samples, and their commercial potential should be assessed before using them. Nevertheless, compared with general interviewing techniques and focus group sessions, the EBNI technique is expected to yield more realistic ideas for new types of services that would be used in the future. The reason for this is that EBNI focuses on concrete usage situations of existing products and services and other, imaginary events, where related needs for new services have arisen. It is very suitable for exploring and broadening the current understanding of customer behaviour. We encourage researchers to test the technique in different types of service and development contexts for different types of products and to develop it further.

#### Notes

1. An avatar is the player's physical representation in the game world. In non-gaming online worlds avatars are used as two-dimensional or three-dimensional human or fantastic representations of a person's self. Avatars are also used by organizations as a way of interacting with consumers.
2. Web 2.0 describes the second-generation use of web applications, sites, companies and attached services that accent openness, community and interaction (Millard and Ross, 2006). Web 2.0 provides an infrastructure for more dynamic user participation, social interaction and collaboration, such as social networking sites, wikis, communication tools, and folksonomies, that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users. The social online services include websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, 2nd Life, MySpace, IRC Gallery, photo sharing (Flickr, Picasa web), and video sharing (You Tube, Google video).

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	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Service category	Mobile service	Location-aware service	Web 2.0 service used linked to an event
Study conducted	2002	2007-2008	2008
New ideas generated/total number of respondents	5/31	15/15	22/25
Interview questions	What mobile services have you used? (provided a list of most popular services) What types of mobile services do you consider valuable? Why?	Have you used a navigator? Have you used a point of interest service? Do you lease or own a car?	What web 2.0 services have you used? (provided a list of most popular web 2.0 networking services)
Preliminary questions	Describe a situation in which you have perceived a mobile service especially valuable to you. Elaborate on what happened, why, and whether you are going to use it again	Describe how you use a navigator Describe how you use a point of interest service	Frequency of visits at the event Describe how you used social forums on the Internet related to this event
Lived critical event			
Other lived event	Have you encountered other similar events where a mobile service was especially valuable to you?	Have you encountered other events with this type of service?	Describe other similar events
Imaginary event	Have you encountered events where mobile service would have been especially valuable to you, but such service does not yet exist, or you haven't used them yet? If yes, please describe the situation	Tell me an imaginary story of how you would have acted if anything was possible. Forget technical restrictions, everything is possible. In the future, the magic wand will let you do what you want	Tell me an imaginary story of how you would have acted if anything was possible. Forget technical restrictions, everything is possible. In the future, the genie of the Internet will help you do what you want
Metaphor used	None	A magic wand, an electronic co-driver, an electronic secretary	A genie of the internet, an electronic secretary, a magic wand
Event-based need	Pedestrian navigation, entertainment, translation	In-advance advice for navigation, voice-based interface	Better use experience of creating and sharing content through different channels

*(continued)*

**Table AI.**  
Summary of the case studies



Table AI.

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Examples of new service ideas generated based on the narratives of the Imaginary event	<p>Service that finds the shortest route from place A to B for pedestrians</p> <p>Service that locates self or others if they are lost, including a map</p> <p>Information to mobile phone on which movies are showing at the nearby cinema</p> <p>Small vocabulary ordered on demand to mobile phone for travellers</p> <p>Picking up rental movies from a dispenser that functions with text messages</p>	<p>Different types of point of interest service</p> <p>Data from driving for specified purposes like electronic report on driving</p>	<p>Service that integrates taking, saving and sharing photos through a mobile device</p> <p>Browser capable of reading the content of pictures</p> <p>Service options are integrated in the weather forecast</p> <p>In an event, I can track and trace my friends</p> <p>If my picture appears on the web, I would automatically get to know it</p> <p>Pictures would have sound and atmosphere in them</p>

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